

## SPIRITUALITY

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Matt 11:25

R<sup>7</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;

you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

R<sup>7</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.**Gospel** Matt 5:17-37; L76A

Jesus said to his disciples:

**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.**

**I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.**

**Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place.**

**Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.**

**But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

**I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.***

**But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raqa,’ will be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna.**

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

Oh, how we covet our personal freedom! From the “terrible twos” to the self-assertiveness of adolescence to the libertarian idealism of many adults, we prefer making our own free choices about the things of daily living rather than being told what to do. In ages past with fewer people on the planet and living farther apart, governing communities was much simpler and required fewer laws and regulations. But healthy communities have never been lawless. Being together implies a kind of give-and-take that is necessary for the common good. Asserting self at the expense of another is never seen as promoting the good life. Thomas Aquinas defined human law as an ordinance of reason promulgated by the proper authority for the common good. We might define God’s law as the ordinance of God’s wisdom, promulgated by Jesus who is the fulfillment of all law, for the righteousness that brings us to be the “greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” God’s law is not about restrictions curbing freedom, but about freeing us to become who God intends us to be.

We need God’s law to guide us because we are imperfect, coming only slowly to the fulfillment that Jesus promises. However, Jesus makes clear that simply keeping the law—as the scribes and Pharisees were so careful about doing—is not enough. The gospel is a lengthy comparison between the law of the old covenant (especially as the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus refers in the gospel interpreted and lived it) and a new law—a new covenant—Jesus offers. The point of Jesus’ lengthy discourse is clear: he is challenging us to a whole new covenantal relationship as the basis for interpreting and choosing to keep God’s law. Jesus’ new covenant is built on the right relationships that extend beyond the mandate of the law.

In all the examples in this gospel that Jesus gives about the law (“You have heard”), he urges his hearers to live the law to God’s intended fulfillment of it (“But I say”). The intended fulfillment of the law is the “righteousness” (right relationship with God and others) which identifies those who are the “greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” *The* “greatest in the kingdom of heaven” is Jesus himself who is the fulfillment of the law in his very Person. If we are to be “greatest in the kingdom of heaven,” we must encounter Jesus himself, *the* righteous One, *the* fulfillment of the law.

No law—whether divine or human—can cover all the right choices we are to make as we journey through life in community. Both the gospel and first reading point to what more is needed: “trust in God,” right choices that bring life to ourselves and others, relying on the wisdom and understanding of God who knows us better than we know ourselves. Our own choices for good—for life—can only come when we open ourselves to God’s guidance and wisdom. In this is the promise of fullness of Life. In this is our life in Christ.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

Four times in the gospel Jesus says these or similar words: “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you . . .” How easy it is for us to do just the minimum! Jesus invites us to rethink our relationships with others, now on his terms. We are to act with the same loving kindness as God has acted toward us. We must say and mean yes often—a yes that is a choice for life and goodness.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 267.

or Matt 5:20-22a, 27-28, 33-34a, 37 in Appendix A, p. 267.